



Can Immigration Be Reformed?

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

The U.S. Congress has an opportunity this spring to resolve one of the most urgent issues facing our nation. Virtually everyone agrees our immigration and border security systems are broken, and must be repaired.

My hope is that we will be able to achieve real, workable solutions in the next few months. Otherwise, we run the risk of this critical issue becoming bogged down in 2008 presidential election politics.

Over the past two years, with Congress in Republican hands, some border security measures were approved. But overall, we dropped the ball. Now Congress is under new management, and the need for progress on broad reforms is even more urgent.

In our post-9/11 world, securing America's borders is critical to our national security. Yet thousands of illegal immigrants continue to stream across our borders every month, creating an unacceptable threat in these times.

Any new immigration policy must start with concern about keeping America's homeland safe from those who wish to do us harm. The first step in regaining control over our immigration system is controlling our borders.

So far, the federal government has not devoted adequate funds, resources or manpower to fully enforce our laws. Last year, I introduced a measure to provide \$3.9 billion in emergency funding for new agents, detention beds, employer verification and strategic barriers that had been previously authorized—but not funded—by Congress.

Unfortunately, that measure did not pass. Authorizing border security measures is meaningless unless we put the funds and resources behind them.

A second key element is eliminating the magnet of illegal employment. The single most effective way to reduce illegal immigration is to restore credibility to our workplace regulations. But current laws are largely unenforceable. Even the most honest employers are unable to determine whether their employees are legal. We must devise an effective electronic system that will allow employers to verify immediately a worker's identity and authorization to work in the United States.

Once we have such a system in place, we must

then give officials sufficient resources to conduct worksite enforcement actions—not to penalize legitimate businesses, but to deter employers who deliberately violate the law by hiring illegal workers.

Finally, we must eliminate the identity theft and document fraud that facilitates this situation. Any documents that can be used for identity and employment verification must be secure, tamper-resistant and counterfeit-proof, and include biometric features for verification.

These measures will be costly. But any reform effort must be grounded on a system of laws that can be enforced, and respected.

Texans are on the front lines of this national immigration debate. Our state and our nation have always welcomed immigrants, and been enriched by their energy, their work ethic, and their culture. This will continue to be the case.

But as we accommodate legal migrants, we must ensure that our reformed immigration system furthers the goals of America and serves the needs of our economy. We must also make certain that we know who is entering our country, and do our best to eliminate those who would do us harm.

For far too long, Washington has ignored the flaws in our nation's immigration policy. If anything, the situation has deteriorated in recent months. Special interest groups on both ends of the political spectrum now dominate the debate, employing scare tactics to scuttle reforms that do not comport with their narrow views.

I will continue doing what I can this year to push toward a solution. Reform will not be easy, but the status quo is unacceptable. Doing nothing is not an option.

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: www.cornyn.senate.gov/column